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Breaking News: "Wisconsin legislators pass a bill requiring private and parochial schools accepting voucher payments to abide by open records and open meetings laws." Does this statement shock you? While this has not become law, there is a very real possibility that this could be law a decade from now. Let me explain. Early last year, many private and parochial schools were pushing for a statewide voucher program. After all, this would be the greatest thing since sliced bread, right? Free money! Fortunately, not every parochial and private school board and principal sees it this way. Yes, I did vote for the voucher program via the 2015-17 state budget; it was the right thing to do. Low-income parents – parents who, previously, had zero ability to pay for a parochial or private school education – now have the opportunity to choose a school where their children can thrive. A word of caution though, the political winds will eventually shift in Wisconsin and program rules will change. Need proof? How about this real life anecdote - during one of our last Assembly floor sessions in February, Democrats attempted to bring a bill to the floor for a vote that would have required any school in the choice program to abide by open meetings and open records laws, thereby opening every Christian, choice school and their policies to public scrutiny.

During recent CESA 6 meetings with area public school superintendents and school board members there was dissent over the requirement that public school districts transport voucher kids and provide special education resources. Truth be told, I can envision a day when legislation will rear its ugly head requiring voucher schools that receive state transportation aid get their own kids to school and fund their own special education programs (even though special education dollars are allocated from the federal government to run the program). And what about the trending requirement that public schools provide changing rooms for kids who identify as the opposite sex? What about the sex education curriculum? When will creationism be challenged by the requirement to also teach evolution? How about Bible study, discussions of sin and societal ills in a Christian school? Prayer in school? And what kids will be required to attend religion class? I can guarantee that no voucher school will be safe from these mandates, intense scrutiny and oversight. Activist courts have already bastardized the First Amendment; thus, I don't believe the Supreme Court would stand in the way of a law prohibiting prayer in publicly funded parochial schools if voucher students are present. Consider the following excerpt from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) convention resolution in 1967: "...1) avoid any aid that would hinder our Christian schools from carrying out their objectives, 2) avoid any aid that would lead to dependency upon the government and would undermine our Christian stewardship, 3) avoid any aid that would bring with it improper government control..."

While the choice program is an excellent outreach tool and a truly useful welfare program, it will be evolving for years to come and must be utilized with extreme caution. I urge any school considering participation in the voucher program to set defined limits and remember that there is no such thing as a free lunch - there must be an exit strategy.